Curriculum & Instruction Review

3

Saskatchewan Children

Their Lives and Needs

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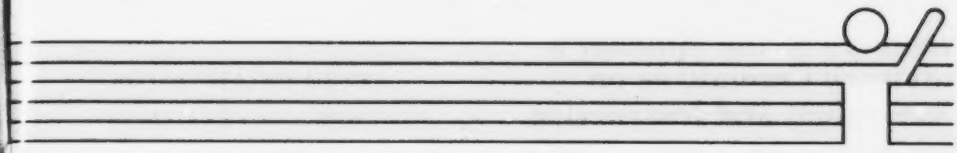
Saskatchewan
Education



Saskatchewan Children

Their Lives and Needs

Minister's Advisory Committee
Curriculum and Instruction Review
December 1984

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Statistics used in this report were provided by various branches of Saskatchewan Education.

Case Studies in Chapter Four are fictitious.

Summary of Curriculum and Instruction Review Reports

The Minister's Advisory Committee on Curriculum and Instruction collected a large amount of information on educational issues. In addition to its final report, **Directions**, the Committee prepared five booklets which contain background information. These are described briefly below.

DIRECTIONS: The Curriculum and Instruction Review was initiated as a means of assessing educational needs in Saskatchewan and proposing improvements to the education system. **Directions**, the final report, presents the major concerns, the Committee's response to those concerns, and the Committee's recommendations for educational improvement.

WHAT THEY SAID: The Curriculum and Instruction Review sought public opinion on education by distributing a questionnaire, holding public meetings around the province, and asking for the submission of briefs. **What They Said** presents the educational views of those people who responded to the Committee's requests.

SASKATCHEWAN EDUCATION: The Curriculum and Instruction Review proposed a number of changes that will affect the Department of Education. **Saskatchewan Education** outlines those changes and examines the role and responsibility of the Department in implementing the recommendations of the Review.

SASKATCHEWAN CHILDREN: The success of an education system is largely dependent upon its ability to respond to the needs of its students. **Saskatchewan Children** explores the educational needs of children and the unique characteristics of children in this province.

TOWARD THE YEAR 2000: Technological and social changes of the future will undoubtedly affect life on this planet. **Toward the Year 2000** examines the predictions of futurists as to how education should change in order to better prepare students for the future.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: A school's environment has a profound effect on both the productivity and satisfaction of its students. **School Improvement** examines the effect of school environment on learning, and explores ways of building more effective learning environments in Saskatchewan schools.

How Children Grow

No two children are exactly the same. Each child has a different combination of personal characteristics and is subject to a unique set of environmental influences. There are, however, a sequence of developmental stages which are common to all children.

Child development can be divided into three areas: cognitive development refers to a child's growing intellectual capacity, psycho-motor development refers to physical growth, and social/emotional development refers to a child's growing ability to interact with others and deal with emotions and feelings.

Not all children pass through the developmental stages at the same age, and not all children reach the same levels of development. It is important that every child be seen as an individual, and that each step be seen as individual progress.

Intellectual Development

Most educators find that children learn to form concepts and develop intellectually in a sequence of stages. All children go through the stages in the same order, although they progress at varying rates.

During the first developmental stage, children learn largely through physical contact with their surroundings. In the second period, children learn language. This vastly expands their ability to build concepts, since they can now label everything. But children's logical powers at this stage are not well developed and the mind is not yet equipped to make certain connections. For example, when shown two balls of clay of identical size, children at the second stage of development will readily agree that they contain the same amount of clay. However, if one ball is rolled into a long snake, children at this stage will insist that the snake contains more clay than the ball since it is longer. They do not understand that the volume of an object can stay the same even if its shape changes.

During the third stage of development, logical problem-solving abilities grow quickly. Children discover how concepts are related and how they can be combined in categories. For example, they learn that the concepts of chair, couch, and table can all be grouped under the heading of furniture. Children also

It is important that every child be seen as an individual and that each step be seen as individual progress.

learn to break large categories into their components and to regroup concepts. For example, they recognize that bedroom furniture and living room furniture are subdivisions of the concept furniture.

During the fourth stage of intellectual development, the mind is freed from the need for the concrete and becomes capable of handling abstract concepts, hypotheses, and theories. Teenagers can appreciate the structure and themes (not just the plot) of a novel, debate moral issues, and perform abstract mathematical operations.

Many of the factors which affect physical development also impact upon intellectual growth.

The four stages are, in a sense, cumulative. Children cannot progress to stage three, for example, until they have mastered the experiences of the first two stages. One stage builds upon another.

Opinion varies on whether or not the speed at which a child moves through the stages can be accelerated. However, educators do agree that the amount of stimulation a child receives in the home affects intellectual development, as do nutrition and maternal health during pregnancy.

Like mental development, physical development occurs in sequential stages. Children learn to walk before they progress to activities such as dancing, jumping, running, and acrobatics. Children develop physically at different speeds but generally pass through the same fixed sequence of stages.

Many of the factors which affect physical development also impact upon intellectual growth. This is the case even before birth. If a pregnant woman has a poor diet or is addicted to drugs or alcohol, her baby may be smaller at birth and could suffer both physical and mental damage.

The relationship between physical and mental development is strong throughout childhood. Many skills often considered to be intellectual do, in fact, depend very heavily upon physical development. Writing is a good example; a child must have the physical strength and co-ordination to manipulate a pencil before writing is possible.

Throughout childhood and adolescence, physical development is fostered by a balanced diet, adequate medical care, and an environment which is clean, warm, and safe. Children who lack any of these necessities may grow at a slower pace and may suffer from chronic fatigue or illnesses which affect their physical, intellectual, and social functioning.

A small baby's first attachment is to the adults who provide consistent care. Gradually the baby's world widens to include other adults and children. As adolescence approaches, the child develops an interest in the opposite sex.

The home provides the basis for social and emotional development. Parents and siblings are usually the most important people in a young child's life. As the child grows older, the school assumes an increasingly important role.

Healthy emotional development is dependent upon security. The average child is not able to function as an independent, autonomous individual until the late teens. Until that time children need adults to care for them, to protect and comfort them, and to offer them guidance and direction. Children develop most successfully when they know they can rely upon their parents or other adults to meet these needs. The ability to trust others grows out of consistent, loving relationships with adults. Children need to feel good about themselves and their accomplishments. A sense of self-worth results from ongoing relationships with parents, teachers, and others who value them and see them as worthwhile people.

The social and emotional development of children is greatly enhanced when they have opportunities to interact with adults and with children of all ages. Both informal play and structured interactions, like those which take place in the classroom, are important. These interactions give children a chance to practice one of the skills most necessary in adult life — getting along and working with others.

Informal play and structured interactions give children a chance to practice one of the skills most necessary in adult life — getting along and working with others.

The Educational Needs of Children

Teaching and learning is a complicated process. A number of variables affect the success of a lesson, and it is often difficult to assess exactly which factors are most significant for each child.

The teaching and learning process can be looked at in the following way: something is to be learned (curriculum content), and the teacher uses a particular method to teach it (instruction); all of this occurs in a classroom where attitudes, values, and interpersonal relationships are present (the learning environment). Inappropriate decisions made with regard to content and instruction or an inappropriate learning environment can detrimentally affect student learning.

Knowledge about child development and child growth provides guidelines for planning content, instruction, and the learning environment. Although it is difficult to take into account all the variables for all children in the classroom, some basic principles can be used in planning and thereby increase the effectiveness of teaching.

Curriculum Content

Learning material must be presented to children in ways appropriate to their stages of development. A child cannot learn a concept that he or she is simply incapable of comprehending. A very young child, for example, believes that dreams occur in the bedroom. A parent can explain to the child that dreams are only imagination and the child will learn to repeat that dreams are only in his head. But when the child has a frightening dream he will still react as though the dream has really taken place in his room. He is incapable of understanding the concept of imagination.

Learning material must be presented to children in ways appropriate to their stages of development.

In the same way, a young child must learn mathematical concepts using concrete materials. Children in the lower grades are generally incapable of abstract thought. When they begin to think

abstractly, they need to be provided with abstract examples and challenges in order for their mathematical problem-solving abilities to grow.

The same principle applies to physical and social/emotional learning. Just as one cannot teach a baby to run before she can walk, a teacher cannot teach a physical skill that requires a high degree of co-ordination to a child who is too young. Neither can a teacher expect a young child, who does not yet comprehend varying points of view, to debate a complex moral issue.

This is not to say that children should never be challenged with material that is beyond their present level. What is to be learned, however, should be within their grasp.

Students learn most effectively when they perceive their educational program to have relevance and meaning to their world.

Students learn most effectively when they perceive their educational program to have relevance and meaning to their world. They need academic content and instructional resources which relate to their daily lives, to the lives of adults around them, and to their lives in the future. A reading series featuring stories about life in a large American city has little meaning to the child from rural or northern Saskatchewan.

Sometimes new material is seen as important to the student's education, but on the surface does not appear to be relevant. In such a case, the material must be presented within the context of the child's current knowledge. Learning about life in another country is meaningless unless the child can see a link to his own world.

Children cannot be forced to learn material that is either mismatched with their developmental level or irrelevant to their world. It is essential that educators and curriculum developers consider curriculum content in light of these basic principles.

Instruction

Many different instructional techniques can be used in the classroom. Students can work individually or in small groups. They can learn by listening to lectures, reading, role playing, brainstorming, discussing, using audio-visual resources, handling concrete materials, talking to people, and visiting locations in the community. Students can make some of the decisions about what happens in the classroom, or all decisions can be made by the teacher. Students can demonstrate their learning by writing exams and reports, making displays, completing projects, and making presentations.

No single technique can be used effectively all the time. The choice of instructional technique should be based upon two factors: the needs of the child, and the demands of the instructional objective.

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The concept of continuous progress is based on the idea that all children have a right to instruction that is appropriate to their individual needs and levels of development. It is known that there are many ways of learning and that children learn at different rates. The teacher, then, must plan instruction to best meet the needs of students.

The setting of instructional objectives is the foundation for good teaching. A teacher cannot select an appropriate instructional strategy without clarifying exactly what it is that students are to learn. Once an instructional objective has been determined, the instructional strategy that will best teach the objective can be chosen.

Just as the choice of content is of the utmost importance to learning, so is the choice of appropriate instructional technique. A balance is needed in the classroom so that teachers can deal with a large group of children and still meet individual learning requirements. A balance of strategies can provide variety in the classroom and give students the opportunity to learn by working alone or with others.

Learning Environment

The environments of the classroom and school strongly influence student learning. The environment can either be a barrier to or a facilitator of learning. Just as appropriate curriculum content varies with stages of development and individual learning needs, so should the learning environment.

Young children need the security of a personalized, caring environment. As children grow older, the need for personal contact remains, but they become more independent and need an environment which allows them to exercise and practice that independence.

The student-teacher relationship is an important part of the environment and the learning process. This relationship can serve as a source of motivation for the student and can also provide some of the emotional support necessary for healthy growth.

Students need teachers who praise their best efforts and their achievements. Praise is a strong motivator, provides feedback to the children regarding their performance, and helps to build a student's sense of self-esteem. This does not mean that praise should be given indiscriminately. Rather, it means that students' legitimate achievements (and these may vary depending upon ability) should be recognized.

Students need to be free of psychological threat in the classroom. Teachers who are able to build strong relationships with students avoid the use of ridicule, humiliation, and sarcasm. Students need to know that their teachers like them and consider them worthwhile.

Children learn most readily in a learning environment that is matched to their educational and personal needs. The spirit or feeling of a classroom or school has a tremendous effect on both learning and satisfaction.

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Special Needs

Meeting the educational needs of children in the province involves the provision of appropriate content, instruction, and environment. The educational needs of most children can be met within the regular classroom by the classroom teacher. There are, however, children who have special needs which stand in the way of educational achievement. In order for these children's educational needs to be met, special support is required.

The services that are required by students vary greatly. A child with a physical disability may require the services of a speech therapist, special education consultant, or physiotherapist. A child with a special talent or interest may require enrichment through association with an artist in the community or a community art program. A child with an emotional problem may require a special environment or the services of a psychologist or guidance counsellor. A child who does not speak English may require a special language program. The child who comes from an unstable domestic situation may require the services of a social worker.

Not all children require special support services. What is crucial is that all children be recognized as having similar and individual needs which must be met if educational objectives are to be realized.

Saskatchewan Children and the School

In the spring of 1984, there were 200,625 students in Saskatchewan schools. Of those, 100,508 attended school in the 11 urban centers in the province. Rural schools in Southern Saskatchewan enrolled 94,782 students, and 5,335 students attended schools in the North.

From 1969 to 1981, enrolment tended to drop in both urban and rural areas. The decrease in rural areas was more pronounced because of the trend toward urbanization. Over the past three years, total provincial enrolments have stabilized.

Most students in Saskatchewan attend local public or separate schools in their communities. Approximately 2,400 students attend private schools, and 3,500 students take all or part of their education through the Provincial Correspondence School. Their reasons for enrolling in the Correspondence School vary and include factors such as time-table conflicts, a desire for extra options, and the inability to attend regular school during the day. A significant number of students register with the Correspondence School because the particular course they want to take is not offered in their local school.

All children develop in much the same way, and basic principles of learning apply to all children.

It is no easy task to describe the characteristics of Saskatchewan children. In Saskatchewan, there are many different geographical areas, ways of life, languages, cultural heritages, and socioeconomic backgrounds. This diversity contributes to the wide range of differences which are found among school children in the province.

Of course there are many similarities among children in the province as well. We know all children develop in much the same way, and basic principles of learning apply to all children. However, in spite of the educational needs that are common to all children, there are a number of unique needs which must be met within the education program.

Rural Students

The school experiences of rural and urban children are in many ways the same. Some attend very small

schools in small communities, others attend large comprehensive schools. There are, however, aspects of rural life which make the school experience unique for some rural children.

Declining enrolments can be a serious problem in rural areas. As schools close because of low enrolments, students are bussed longer distances. Presently, 59,390 rural children are bussed to their schools. The distance travelled and hours spent on the bus vary greatly, but there is no doubt that some students spend long hours travelling to and from school.

Programs for rural children vary from school to school. Programming is a concern because of the possibility that declining enrolments will result in less money being spent on education in rural areas. Rural schools need a variety of Division IV course offerings in order to prepare students for post-secondary options. In some small schools, offering a wide range of options is difficult.

Native Students

It is estimated that between 10% and 15% of children attending Saskatchewan schools are Native children. Because the Native birth rate is higher than the non-Native, it is likely that this proportion will substantially increase in the foreseeable future. A significant number of Saskatchewan children, then, approach education with the unique perspective of Indian and Metis peoples.

Native people tend to be concentrated in certain areas of the province. Presently in Saskatchewan, most northern schools and close to 11% of all provincial schools have over 50% Native enrolment. One in every four schools in the province has at least 15% Native students. Meadow Lake, Blaine Lake, Last Mountain, and Indian Head districts all have over 20% Native enrolment. In urban areas in 1980, at least 15% Native enrolment existed in a number of schools in Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, and North Battleford. The number of Indian and Metis students in urban centers is growing because of the trend toward urban migration.

A significant number of Saskatchewan children approach education with the unique perspective of Indian and Metis people.

Saskatchewan's Native people are one of the most economically disadvantaged groups in the province. Over half of the unemployed in Saskatchewan are Native people. Approximately 70% of all Saskatchewan Native people are living below the poverty line. This includes families who are dependent on welfare and working people who earn

very low incomes. Many Indian and Metis children enter school with the educational disadvantages brought about by poverty.

The dropout rate among Native students is significantly higher than among non-Native students in Saskatchewan. Age/grade deceleration is one predictor of early school leaving, and a significant number of Indian and Metis children are at least one year behind by the time they have reached grade 2.

Northern Students

Five thousand, three hundred and thirty-five students attend school in Northern Saskatchewan.

Schools in Northern Saskatchewan presently fall into four categories: those schools administered by the Northern Lights School Board, those schools administered by independent local school boards, those schools administered by the federal government, and those schools administered by Indian bands. Some schools are large, with over 300 students; others are very small and may have only 30 students.

Until recently, many Northern children would either stay with relatives in a community where there was a school, or leave their families to stay at a federally operated residential school.

Many families in Northern Saskatchewan still depend on fishing, hunting, and trapping for their livelihoods. Until recently, those families lived in the bush, separated from one another in much the same way that farm families are spread across the prairies. In order to attend school, children would either stay with relatives in a community where there was a school, or leave their families to stay at a federally operated school such as the residential school in Prince Albert.

The two predominant Native languages in the North are Cree and Chipewyan. In the past, English speaking teachers had difficulty communicating with Northern children. English as a Second Language programs were instituted and children were encouraged to communicate in English. Now, most children in the North can speak English when they enter school and the danger is present that Northerners will lose their Native languages altogether. As a result, Native language programs have been instituted in schools across the North.

Recently, many small villages have sprung up in the North and families have moved off their traplines in order to have access to running water, electricity, and local schools. Along with modernization comes the possibility that Northern people will lose their traditional way of life.

Cultural Heritage

Saskatchewan children come from a variety of cultural backgrounds. In fact, fewer than half the people of the province are descendants of English-speaking ancestors.

Between 1890 and 1920, large numbers of European immigrants came to the prairies. Many of the descendants of these early settlers identify with their rich cultural heritages, but are also fluent in English and are part of mainstream culture.

The fact that assimilation into mainstream culture is evident among many ethnic groups in the province must not be misread. A number of groups strongly oppose the idea of assimilation and want to retain their language and culture.

Indian and Metis peoples in Saskatchewan feel a sense of urgency about preserving their cultural identity. There is no home country other than Canada to which young people can go for cultural renewal, and the possibility exists that Native languages and culture could die with the old people. Native people do want their children to acquire a good education and the ability to earn a good living, but not at the expense of their cultural identity.

There are a number of communities in Saskatchewan which have a largely French Canadian population. In these communities, either the school is a designated French language school or a program is provided for French speaking students in which instruction takes place in the French language. These programs are different from immersion programs in that they are designed for students whose first language is French. There are about 500 students in French language schools or programs. In addition, well over 400 Francophone students are enrolled in regular French immersion programs in the province.

There are a number of families in Saskatchewan who have recently immigrated from other countries. During the past several years more immigrants have come from Asia than from any other geographic area. In 1980, fully 50% of Canada's immigrants were Asians. The children of some of these immigrant families, usually lacking knowledge of English, are now attending Saskatchewan schools.

A small grant is available from Saskatchewan Education for school boards to initiate special instruction in English for immigrant children. Other provisions are made at the discretion of individual boards. Such programs are aimed at integrating

A number of groups strongly oppose the idea of assimilation and want to retain their language and culture.

children into regular classrooms, while providing the instruction and support needed to enable them to acquire an education and adapt to Canadian life.

Early school leavers in Saskatchewan leave school before graduating for a variety of reasons, both personal and school-related.

Early School Leavers

The rate of early school leaving between grades 8 and 12 in Saskatchewan is currently about 30%. This compares with a rate of 27% in Canada as a whole. When rates are examined by sex and rural/urban location, it is found that rural males have the highest rate of early school leaving (38.79%), and rural females have the lowest rate (22.31%). Urban females leave school between grades 8 and 12 at a rate of 29.86%, and urban males leave at a rate of 33.21%.

Saskatchewan students leave school before graduating for a variety of reasons, both personal and school-related. School-related reasons include failure, dissatisfaction with teachers, and dissatisfaction with courses.

Children From Single-Parent Families

In 1981, Statistics Canada reported that there are 6,324,975 families in Canada. Of these, 714,010 or 11.2% had only one parent in the home.

In Saskatchewan the number of single-parent families is below the Canadian average. The 1981 census found that 23,650 or 9.6% of the 245,675 families in Saskatchewan were headed by single parents.

Being from a single-parent family does not necessarily affect a child's schooling. However, most single parent families are headed by women, and the average yearly income of women is substantially lower than that of men. The 1981 census found that families headed by women had an average income of $13,790.00 compared to the national average family income of $26,748.00. About 42% of families headed by women had an income of less than $10,000. A substantial number of children from single-parent families, then, live with the disadvantages associated with poverty. In addition, a number of children from single-parent families have recently been separated from one parent through death or divorce.

Teenage Parents

In 1982, there were over 3,000 babies born to single mothers in Saskatchewan. Of those, about 1500 were born to teenage girls between the ages of 15 and 19.

In the past, teenage girls tended to give their babies up for adoption. Today, the majority of young single women who become pregnant are keeping their babies and assuming the responsibilities of parenthood. The educational needs of these young parents are, in some ways, unique. They require relevant information on parenting and family life, and they need support and understanding to enable them to overcome barriers and complete their educations.

Exceptional Children

The abilities of individual children are difficult, perhaps impossible, to measure accurately. In addition, there is danger in categorizing children that expectations will be tied to a label and that children will be seen as part of a group and not as individuals. Nonetheless, there are children who display the need for some sort of special service. There are children whose social situation interferes with learning, children whose skills and knowledge go beyond the norm for their age group, children with highly specialized interests, and children with physical disabilities who require special supports or learning situations.

Exact numbers of Saskatchewan children at the lower and upper ends of the developmental scale have not been discerned. It has been assumed that about 2.5% or 5,000 children in the province have some degree of mental retardation, with about .5% or 1,000 of these children being severely mentally handicapped.

By a traditional definition of giftedness, it is thought that 2.5% to 5% of the population is gifted. Using this definition, there are between five and ten thousand gifted children in Saskatchewan. A more liberal definition recognizes that as many as 20% of children may require intellectual stimulation beyond that usually provided in the regular classroom. This suggests that as many as 40,000 children are in need of enrichment.

Some Saskatchewan children suffer from learning disabilities which affect their functioning at school. Terms such as dyslexia and minimal brain dysfunction are often used when referring to learning disabilities. The learning disabled child tends to have specific problems in certain subject areas, such as reversing or mixing up sequences of numbers and letters, or writing numbers or letters backwards. Severely learning disabled children may be unable to read.

The abilities of individual children are difficult to measure accurately. Nonetheless, there are children who display the need for some sort of special service.

It is difficult to estimate the incidence of hearing handicaps since there are differences in testing methods and in definition of the disability. For a small number of severely hearing disabled children, special schooling is necessary. In the 1981-82 school term, 110 hearing impaired and eight deaf-blind children were enrolled in the R.J.D. Williams Provincial School for the Deaf. An additional 210 children in regular classrooms were identified for special funding from the Department of Education.

Severe visual disorders are less common than hearing disabilities. It is estimated that from .01% to .04% of children with visual disorders are blind and from .06% to .14% have partial vision. In 1982-83, two Saskatchewan children attended the W. Ross McDonald School for the Blind in Brantford, Ontario. Special funding and services were provided for another 56 partially sighted children in regular classrooms.

The educational experience is not the same for every child. The characteristics of a child — the home situation, where the child lives, the child's abilities and handicaps — all affect the school day.

Young Offenders

In 1981 there were 2,744 charges laid in juvenile court against children aged 7 to 15. In other words, charges were laid against just under 2% of children in this age group. This figure is below the Canadian average. With the adoption of the Young Offenders Act, juveniles 16 and 17 years of age will not be tried in adult court, and the number of charges laid against juveniles will increase.

Again these young people have special educational needs. Where at all possible, young people are not incarcerated. They are encouraged to attend school, often the public school closest to their home. The odds are against these young people completing high school.

Meet Some Saskatchewan Children

The educational experience is not the same for every child. The characteristics of a child — the home situation, where the child lives, the child's abilities and handicaps — all affect the school day. Some children board a bus at 7:30 in the morning, some are in classrooms with several grades, some require special services, some have very unique needs.

Here, then, are the school experiences of eight Saskatchewan children.

Alice

Alice goes to Kindergarten in a small rural community. Her house is three blocks from her school, which is a kindergarten to grade 12 school. Some children in her class live in town, some come on the bus from as far away as 20 miles. Alice attended a co-operative play school before she went to kindergarten. The playschool was organized by some parents in the town and was held two mornings a week in a church basement. Alice's older sister is in grade 2. She takes piano lessons from a woman who lives down the street. Alice looks forward to being old enough to take piano lessons and join the town's Brownie pack. She is taking figure skating for the first time this year. Alice's parents would like their children to be enrolled in a French immersion program, but so far there has not been enough interest generated in the community to warrant offering such a program. However, Alice's family likes living in the rural community and feels that the benefits of small town life outweigh the disadvantages.

Carly

Eight year old Carly lives in a small village of 200 people in Northern Saskatchewan. Her family used to live in the bush all year round, but they have recently moved into the village so they can have a home equipped with electricity and running water, and so the children can go to school. Carly's older brothers and sisters had to go to Prince Albert to a residential school, but now Carly will be able to stay with her family, at least until she goes to high school.

Her school is small, just four classrooms and four teachers. The building consists of several portable trailers, and about 60 children attend. Most of the teachers are not Northerners, but come from various places in the South. There are, however, two Native student teachers from the community in the school. The student teachers leave the community for blocks of time to attend classes, then return to the community to work in the school. In addition to completing practical work for their programs, the student teachers assist the teachers in communicating with children who do not speak English well. They also provide an important link between the teachers and the community.

At various times of the year Carly is absent from school. Her parents believe in involving the whole family in fishing, hunting, and trapping. Catching up on her schoolwork is difficult for Carly, but her family values the traditional way of life.

Christopher

Seven-year-old Christopher has multiple handicaps. He attends a developmental classroom housed in an elementary school. Every morning a taxi picks him up at his home and drives him to school. There, Christopher is met by a teacher aide who has been hired especially to work with him in the classroom. The aide carries out a program that has been designed for Christopher by the teacher and a special education consultant. Once a week, a speech therapist comes to the school to work with him. Interaction between the children in Christopher's class and other children in the school has been encouraged. Christopher takes part in the school's swim program, and some of the older children in the school visit the developmental classroom at noon hour and at recess. Still, segregation is a problem Christopher's school is working to overcome.

Randy

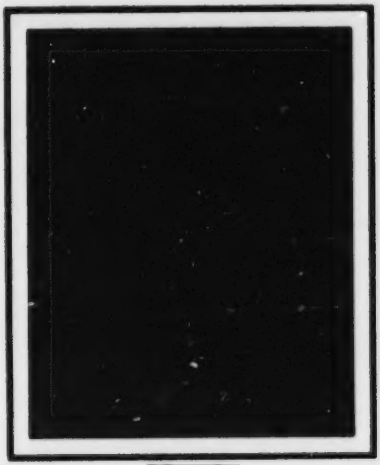
Randy is 17 years old and attends a large comprehensive high school. The course options in the school are extensive and Randy has had no trouble registering in the courses of his choice.

The extracurricular activities in the school are also extensive and the school has been the focal point of Randy's life for the past four years. He is in the school band, plays basketball, is on the school track and field team, and is on the student council.

Randy lives close to the school and his involvement fits easily into family routines. His family has taken an interest in his activities and regularly attends school games and other public events.

Karen

Karen is a single teenage mother. During her pregnancy, she decided to keep her baby and return to school to finish her grade 12. She lives at home with her parents and takes her baby to a sitter during the day. Every day Karen leaves home with her books, her baby, and a diaper bag. She takes a city bus to the sitter's, then catches another bus to school. She is very concerned about making a living to support herself, and wants to go on to some kind of post-secondary training. She does not participate in any extracurricular activities as her out-of-school time is taken up with raising her child. She sometimes feels alienated from the other students in her school, and wishes there were a course she could take which related to her situation. Although she get lots of support from her family, she worries about money and being a good parent to her child.

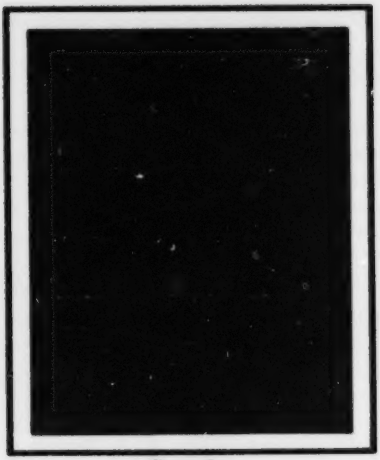


Martin

Martin is 13 years old and is in grade 8 in an inner city school. Although he has many relatives living on a nearby reserve, Martin's family has lived in the city for a long time.

The Native population in Martin's school is high, over 40%, and some special programs have been instituted to meet the needs of Indian and Metis children. A Native pre-kindergarten class is housed in the school to provide academic and school readiness skills for preschoolers. There are two Native teacher associates in the school. They help teachers in the classrooms with communication and do some teaching of Native handicrafts and traditions. The school has a nutrition program, and provides morning and afternoon snacks for all children in the school. The school has made a concerted effort to be a part of the community. Still, many Native parents do not feel they share a part in their children's educations and find it difficult to support and assist them.

Martin is doing well in school. Even so, he does not feel completely comfortable in the classroom. Over the years he has watched many of his peers drop behind. He knows they do not like school and plan to quit as soon as they are old enough.



Jamie

Jamie is 15 and lives on a farm in Southern Saskatchewan. He goes to high school 22 miles from his home, and boards a school bus at 20 after 7 every morning. He is planning to go to university after he finishes high school and is taking a university entrance program. He is interested in languages and takes German by correspondence in addition to the French course that is offered in his school. In the winter, Jamie plays basketball on the school team. On the evenings that his team practices, one of his parents drives into town to pick him up. Sometimes, when this is inconvenient, Jamie misses a practice. He is involved with his local 4-H horse club, and this is somewhat easier as the meetings are held closer to his home. When his school holds a special event, such as a school dance, Jamie stays overnight with a relative in town. Jamie likes living on the farm, but he sometimes feels he misses out on extracurricular opportunities.

Michelle

Eleven-year old Michelle lives in a community which is predominantly French speaking. The area was settled in the early 1900's by groups of people who came from Quebec to homestead. The community has retained its use of the French language, and its elementary school has been designated a French language school. There are a number of English speaking children in the community, and an English stream within the school has been provided for them.

The courses that Michelle studies are identical to the courses that other children in the province study except that they are taught in French. Michelle studies English for one hour every day.

Michelle's family has not yet decided where she will attend high school. If they wish her education to continue in French, she will attend College Mathieu, a private residential school in Gravelbourg. Otherwise, she will attend the local high school and take Advanced French as an elective course.

Educational Improvement

Saskatchewan children have a wide range of needs and abilities. They live in varying geographic locations, and come from diverse backgrounds and home situations. The question, then, for those who engage in educational improvement is: *How can we make the school system suitable for all children in the province?*

The foundation of the system must be built upon the principles of child development. Curriculum developers and teachers must bear in mind that learning is sequential, and that children learn at varying rates. Content must be presented appropriately, and the method of instruction must be considered.

The Curriculum and Instruction Review Committee made a number of recommendations that concern all children in the province. Specifically, the Committee recommended changes to affect content, instruction, and school environment. In addition, the Committee proposed changes to the support services structure in order to assist teachers in meeting the special needs of children.

Curriculum developers and teachers must bear in mind that learning is sequential and that children learn at varying rates.

Core Curriculum

A number of problems surfaced during the review which prompted the Committee to recommend that a core curriculum be developed for all students in the province:

- there is inequality in the present school system (some needs are being met, others are not)
- requirements of the future are not easily incorporated into current curricula
- there are variations with respect to progress and movement through the system
- there are discrepancies with respect to program offerings between large and small schools.

A core curriculum, developed within the context of a policy review and with the involvement of educators and interest groups, was seen as a way to provide all students in Saskatchewan with a relevant education based upon the principles of child development.

School Improvement

The Committee determined that two problems in particular concerning student learning could be dealt with through school improvement projects:

- inconsistent quality of instruction
- inappropriate learning environments.

School improvement is a problem-solving process involving everyone in the school. The entire program is looked at, including the content, the instruction, and the environment. Those involved decide what is good and what needs to be changed. Ways of building more effective learning environments are explored through projects at the local level. The focus is on planning together to bring about change.

School improvement is a problem-solving process involving everyone in the school.

A school improvement project is a means of making a school work for all children to ensure that all needs are met.

Support Services

Even with a core curriculum in place and school improvement projects underway, there are students whose needs cannot be met without special services. The Curriculum and Instruction Review Committee determined that changes are needed in the way support services are currently delivered to the student.

Teaching children the knowledge and skills they will need to live successfully as adults is the major task of the school. The greatest learning takes place when a child's most fundamental needs have been met. In some cases, meeting students' basic physical and personal needs is the first step toward meeting their educational needs.

One of the main problems perceived by the Committee is that teachers are currently called upon to deliver the support services to children with special needs. This means that often needs cannot be met promptly and efficiently. Co-ordination of support services is needed at the local level, and the means of delivering services should be looked at closely.

Summary

Great variety is found in the educational experiences of Saskatchewan children. The Curriculum and Instruction Review Committee saw educational improvement, to a large degree, in terms of better meeting the needs of children in the province. Some of its recommendations were aimed at meeting the needs of all children in the province, and some were aimed at providing better and more satisfying educational experiences for children with special needs.

There are many excellent programs now available for Saskatchewan children. New initiatives will enrich the educational experience for students at all levels.